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ABSTRACT

A hearing was held to obtain information about the General Services Administration's (GSA) decision to transfer responsibilities for establishing child care centers in federal buildings from its jurisdiction to that of the Office of Personnel and Management. Testifying before the subcommittee was the Acting General Services Administrator, Richard G. Austin, and Mr. Robert Tobias, the national president of the National Treasury Employees Union. Implications of the transfer are investigated. (RH)

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CHILD CARE IN FEDERAL BUILDINGS: GSA OVERSIGHT

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HEARING

BEFORE THE

GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES AND TRANSPORTATION SUBCOMMITTEE

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FIRST CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

MARCH 8, 1989

Printed for the use of the Committee on Government Operations

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CHILD CARE IN FEDERAL BUILDINGS: GSA OVERSIGHT

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 1989

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES AND
TRANSPORTATION SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:08 a.m., in room 2247, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Cardiss Collins (chairwoman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Cardiss Collins, Howard C. Nielson, and C. Christopher Cox.

Also present: John R. Galloway, staff director; LaQuietta Hardy-Davis, professional staff member; Cecelia Morton, clerk; and Ken Salaets, minority professional staff, Committee on Government Operations.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN COLLINS

Mrs. COLLINS. Good morning. This hearing of the Government Activities and Transportation Subcommittee will come to order.

One of this subcommittee's most successful efforts during the last Congress involved the establishment of workplace child care centers for Federal employees in GSA-controlled buildings. When we issued our October 1987 child care report, there were only 10 child care centers in GSA buildings. To remedy that situation, we called upon GSA to abandon its passive role and exercise leadership within the Federal Government by directly encouraging and assisting agencies in renting space through GSA for child care.

Then-GSA Administrator Terrence Golden responded enthusiastically in making GSA the catalyst, to use his own term, in promoting onsite child care for Federal workers. Mr. Golden recognized that the child care needs of the Federal worker are no less than those of private sector employees, and that child care also benefits the Federal Government by increasing productivity and reducing absenteeism.

Following Mr. Golden's initiative, the number of child care centers in GSA buildings nationwide jumped from 10 to 35 with additional centers scheduled for opening by September 30 of this year. That success followed Mr. Golden's appointment of a high-ranking GSA official, who reported directly to him and who has sufficient clout to represent the Administrator within both GSA and throughout the Federal Government. With that support, the GSA

child care coordinator took the lead in determining the child care needs of Federal workers at specific locations and educating agencies on the need for and feasibility of particular centers.

When word got out, however, that Mr. Golden would be leaving GSA in March 1988, the dormant opposition to child care within GSA surfaced. Some examples: First, GSA's highly successful child care coordinator, Barbara Leonard, was shunted to a bureaucratic Siberia regarding child care and denied a promised child care staff budget. Without backing from Mr. Golden's two successors, Mrs. Leonard fell victim to bureaucratic snipers, who denied her travel authority and access to child care information.

While still today officially designated as the Administrator's child care representative, Mrs. Leonard was not even included among those GSA officials who were asked to comment on GSA's proposed new guidebook for establishing child care centers in GSA-controlled space.

Additionally, GSA, which under Mr. Golden sought to actively interest agencies in renting space for child care, abandoned its leadership role in transferring that responsibility to parents. Thus, under GSA's proposed new guidebook, parents will be confronted with the difficult task of planning and organizing proposed centers and persuading their agency bosses to rent the necessary space with no help from GSA.

Given GSA's performance, it's not surprising that the current Acting GSA Administrator recently seized upon a memorandum from the former Deputy head of OMB as justification for GSA's child care retreat. The memorandum, the September 1988 Joe Wright memorandum, was not, however, a policy directive in the conventional sense. Rather, it discussed (a), "communications/PR plan to be carried out with Presidential involvement during September," in the midst of the Presidential campaign. As such, it was addressed not to policymakers, but to a White House secretary and a White House public relations official, Mari Maseng.

Key to the memorandum was a decision that the campaign public relations concerning child care overall would be handled by the Department of Labor, while child care PR regarding Federal workers would be undertaken by the Office of Personnel Management.

Seemingly intent, however, to justify GSA's about-face on child care, Mr. Austin told an Appropriations subcommittee earlier this month that based on, "decisions by the President's Domestic Policy Council, GSA would no longer be the lead agency in encouraging parents to develop child care facilities."

Instead, he said the emphasis has changed and OPM has assumed that function with GSA reduced to a supportive role. If so, the role reversal referred to by the Acting Administrator was news to OPM, whose officials last week denied any knowledge of their agency's supposed new rule. Indeed, the claim switch may even be news to some at the Office of Management and Budget, based on a February 27 letter in which Mr. Austin queried that office 5 months after the fact on whether GSA's interpretation of the Wright memorandum is correct. Based on Mr. Austin's recent actions and correspondence to this subcommittee, which is attached to my statement, it is clear that GSA, after having accomplished so

much in terms of child care, has withdrawn into its bureaucratic shell. As a result, GSA projects only two additional centers in fiscal year 1990 and one for 1991, according to a January 1989 GSA planning document.

That's bad news for Federal workers and good news for those at GSA who could never understand why GSA should be actively involved in child care.

Presumably also that should come as a surprise to President Bush, who during the Presidential campaign on July 24 issued a factsheet that stated: "George Bush would initiate employer-sponsored day care starting with the Federal Government as a model. He would see that every agency provided federally-sponsored child care to Government employees."

To assist the subcommittee in further evaluating GSA child care retreat in the face of President Bush's pledge, we will receive testimony today from GSA Acting Administrator, Mr. Richard G. Austin, and Robert M. Tobias, who is the national president for the National Treasury Employees Union.

Mr. Austin, you may begin your testimony.

Mr. NIELSEN. Madam Chairwoman.

Mrs. COLLINS. Oh, I'm sorry. Mr. Nielsen.

Mr. NIELSEN. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. Good morning.

I was rather surprised when I first found out we'd be holding another hearing on this matter. I, along with the chairwoman, thought this child care issue had been pretty well settled 2 years ago, and I was very pleased about the work GSA was doing. As a matter of fact, I attended, or had staff attend, the dedication of the child care center in Ogden, UT, one of the model child care centers under GSA's direction.

After reading some of the background materials and listening to the chairwoman, I can understand the concern. Statements that have been made in the past month seem to indicate a possible return to a child care policy where no Federal agency has a definitive lead role. This would be most unfortunate, in my view.

Out of fairness, we should point out President Bush has yet to enunciate what his policy on child care will be. In that respect, we may be jumping the gun a bit by expecting Mr. Austin to be able to adequately address this issue.

Nevertheless, it is important that the momentum we have developed in the past year not be lost, and the sooner the administration moves forward on this, the better for all concerned.

I want to welcome Mr. Austin and your associates, Ms. Jones and Mr. Howard, today, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Mrs. COLLINS. Mr. Cox.

Mr. COX. I'd like just briefly to welcome you here, Mr. Austin, today and to say that I'm looking forward to hearing your testimony and also looking forward to looking into the issue of child care, because I'm convinced that George Bush means it when he says that he wants to make the Federal Government a model, and I'm convinced that if we work together, we can accomplish that in short order.

Mrs. COLLINS. Thank you.

Mr. Austin, now you may begin your testimony.

STATEMENT OF RICHARD G. AUSTIN, ACTING ADMINISTRATOR, GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION, ACCOMPANIED BY YVONNE T. JONES, ACTING ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, GOVERNMENT-WIDE REAL PROPERTY POLICY AND OVERSIGHT, AND DUNCAN LENT HOWARD, COMMISSIONER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS SERVICE

Mr. AUSTIN. Madam Chairwoman, may I read my statement into the record, please?

Mrs. COLLINS. Without question.

Mr. AUSTIN. Madam Chairwoman, members of the subcommittee, I am please to be here today and welcome the opportunity to discuss the activities and the roles of the General Services Administration in the establishment of child care centers for the federally employed.

Since becoming the Acting Administrator in September 1988 and before that as the GSA Regional Administrator in region 5, it has been my pleasure to support this challenging program. The need for child care centers in our Nation is clear. There are 64 million families in the United States. Of these families, 26 million have children under the age of 14. When you combine this information with the current shift in the United States toward two-income families, it is not surprising to see that the effect on the labor force in just 7 years, from 1980 to 1987, the labor force participation rate for married women with children under the age of 3 has increased by 25 percent.

In light of these facts, we recognize the responsibility to the Federal workers to establish child care centers when a need has been established. As you may know, in September 1988, the Office of Management and Budget indicated that the Office of Personnel Management and the Department of Labor are taking leadership roles in providing child care for employees in the Federal and private sectors, respectively. While these roles are being more clearly defined, we at GSA are continuing with our child care initiatives and stand ready to play whatever role the administration deems appropriate.

GSA is committed to locating and making such space available, accomplishing alterations for the facilities, providing the necessary services for day-to-day operation, and maintenance of the space and providing technical guidance and assistance.

We formally announced our support for child care facilities in October 1986 as part of the quality workspace initiative. In May 1987, we met with this subcommittee to discuss the roles of the General Services Administration with respect to providing child care for Federal employees. In the committee's report on child care in Federal buildings, October 2, 1987, you proffered seven recommendations. GSA adopted these recommendations, and I'd like to take just a moment, if I may, to review with you our responses.

Recommendation No. 1: Assign to a high-level GSA official in Washington, DC, specific responsibility for onsite day care with the authority to communicate directly and implement the agency's day care policy initiatives at the GSA regional and local levels.

The GSA child care program has been and continues to be represented by two high-level GSA officials at the central office. The

overall program responsibility for implementing the child care initiative, including the development of policies, procedures, facility construction and oversight of the program rests with Mr. Duncan Lent Howard, Commissioner for the Public Building Service. Mrs. Barbara M. Leonard is currently the Director of Client Relations for the General Services Administration, and in that role, she serves as the ombudsman for client agency issues also including child care.

Recommendation No. 2: Assign within each of GSA's 10 regions an official with overall responsibility for day care with specific responsibilities to work with other Federal agencies at the regional level in promoting onsite child care.

At the regional level, GSA developed an in-house expertise concerning the organization of onsite day care for the benefit of interested parties. Senior-level Public Building Service officials in each regional office have been designated to implement the program and to work with sponsoring agencies. These officials, under the guidance of our central office staff, act as liaison and a coordinator between GSA and local management at various agencies. These officials have held untold numbers of meetings with our client agencies to provide them with indepth information on the entire process for establishing the child care center, gave guidance and support for the needs assessment surveys, assist in the space request process, and, in short, did everything humanly possible to make onsite child care a reality for our clients.

Recommendation No. 3: Recognize and meet its statutory responsibility to rent space in public buildings for child care, similar to its current leasing arrangements with the American Federation of Government Employees in Battle Creek, MI. To further that objective, GSA should endeavor to offer to rent appropriate space in at least one public building in each of the 10 regions within the next year for child care.

While the Cooperative Use Act of 1976 is one of several means by which the Government may make space available in Federal buildings, available for use for child care centers, we did not open the centers under this authority during the fiscal years 1988 and 1989. Though we are willing to use this authority to provide child care facilities, we found that the authorities under the Continuing Resolution of 1986 to be a more efficient means to acquire child care facilities.

Recommendation No. 4: Work with Federal agencies throughout the country to survey Federal workers concerning their interest and needs for onsite child care.

GSA continues to work with Federal agencies to determine their employees interest in onsite child care. During fiscal year 1988, we conducted need assessment surveys in each GSA facility housing 500 or more employees. Approximately 129,000 need assessment questionnaires across the country with 22 percent of these surveys being returned. Of these surveys returned, 39 percent indicated that they wanted child care.

We are continuing to work with agencies to identify their child care needs, to facilitate our planning for future child care centers.

Recommendation No. 5: Where the survey results demonstrate sufficient need and interest in onsite child care, GSA should

present the survey findings to the agencies and recommending establishment of specific child care centers to be sponsored by various agencies.

Only 12 child care centers were in existence in GSA-controlled space prior to fiscal year 1988. Based on the results of the survey already completed under our child care initiative, we have opened 34 additional child care centers since our program began in fiscal year 1989. Action is underway to establish additional child care centers during fiscal year 1989 and beyond whenever there is a demonstrable need.

Recommendation No. 6: In determining the feasibility of particular day care centers, full weight should be given to determination by Congress that such centers may be open up to 50 percent to children of non-Federal workers, subject, however, to priority for Federal workers. Such outside participation should be especially encouraged when necessary to assure the financial viability of a particular center. While the potential use of child care center by children of Federal employees is the primary determinant in the decision to establish a new center, we do have children of non-Federal parents enrolled in our centers. As of this date, approximately 23 percent nationally of the children enrolled are children of non-Federal parents.

Recommendation No. 7: GSA, with the assistance of other appropriate agencies, should prepare and distribute to interested parties a handbook to assist in the establishment of onsite day care.

A draft child care guidebook has been completed and is presently undergoing final review by GSA senior management and other agencies involved in the child care initiative. We expect to issue this guidebook in the near future. When issued, the guidebook will make the process of establishing a child care center more efficient for everyone concerned. It is designed to assist Federal agencies which occupy GSA-controlled space in establishing onsite child care centers.

Additionally, the guide provides rules and responsibilities of GSA, the sponsoring agencies, organizing committees, child care providers, and the child care consultant.

In addition, we have developed and distributed to interested parties other pamphlets and materials which will assist in establishing child care facilities.

To date, we have 46 child care centers in operation, which are currently caring for more than 1,800 children. The child care tuition fees paid by the parents of these children range from $65 per week in Ogden, UT, to $160 per week for infants in Boston, MA; toddlers fees range from $40 per week in Utah to $140 per week in Boston; and preschool fees range from $40 per week in Utah to $125 per week in New York City.

When all of the 46 centers are operating at capacity, they will be caring for over 1,900 children. The construction costs for these centers ranged between $40 and $50 per square foot. In addition, there are 23 more centers scheduled to open this fiscal year and we are working with agencies to identify additional centers for fiscal years 1990 and 1991.

We have worked closely with the Federal community on child care and will continue to do so. In view of our concerns about child

care costs, we received on a voluntary basis in 1988, salary information from approximately 50 percent of the Federal parents in 10 of the original 12 centers in GSA-controlled space. This information revealed that 62 percent of the parents were grades GS-11 or below, and 38 percent were GS-12 and above. That data served as an indication that the proposed child care centers would be serving a broad range of Federal employees.

To further the spirit of interagency cooperation, when the child care center located at GSA headquarters was established—has established a scholarship program. We jointly with our cosponsoring agencies, the Office of Personnel Management and the Department of Interior, have signed an interagency memorandum supporting scholarship programs.

We have also provided assistance to the Pentagon in its effort to establish an onsite child care facility. GSA not only provided technical assistance and guidance; we also arranged for the transference of ownership of the child care site from GSA to DOD and then assisted—then issued a permit to DOD to allow construction to begin before the transference of ownership was completed.

Onsite child care, particularly in the Federal Government, is a relatively new program. We, as an agency, have learned a great deal about child care since the program's inception and have strived to meet the needs of the Federal community as well as continue to effectively manage our real property assets.

As part of this effort, we continually monitor and evaluate our child care program and issue guidance as necessary. For example, after examining all that we have learned and done through our day-to-day experience with child care, we issued guidance in December 1988 which clarified GSA's policy on providing space for child care centers. This guidance to our Assistant Regional Administrators for the Public Building Service reiterated space requests for child care centers would be a priority in GSA when necessary.

When necessary, GSA will lease space to house child care facilities or to relocate agencies' activities displaced by child care facilities established in GSA-controlled spaces, and it reiterates the requirements applicable to space use for child care centers, that is, interior space finishing, outside space areas, building service levels, et cetera. We feel that this will strengthen our child care program and facilitate communications with our client agencies.

In summary, we at GSA take pride in our accomplishments since undertaking the task of establishing child care centers in the Federal communities where there are demonstrated needs. GSA is meeting and will continue to meet the needs of the Federal employee in agencies for onsite child care.

This concludes my formal statement, and I'd be happy to respond to questions as you may have them, Madam Chairwoman, and other members of the committee.

Mrs. COLLINS. When the subcommittee issued its child care report in October 1987, there were only 10, as we've said in our opening statement, onsite child care centers in GSA control. Would you know why there were such a small number of child care centers at that time? Have you reviewed the development of child care centers prior to the time that we issued that report?

Mr. AUSTIN. Madam Chairwoman, I'd simply be speculating. I would assume that while the interest was there, it was not a directed interest and therefore the level of involvement of GSA and certainly the stimulus from this committee led to the further expansion of that program.

Mrs. COLLINS. I have some very great concerns, because I thought we were going great guns with onsite child care for Federal employees. It is a program that has certainly been very beneficial, and to now see that there seems to be some withdrawal from doing the kind of aggressive child care center opening that had been done in the past leaves me with some real distress. What I'd like to know is why exactly is GSA withdrawing from aggressively pursuing opening child care centers for Federal employees?

Mr. AUSTIN. Well, Madam Chairwoman, if I may, not necessarily to take issue. We have continued on with the kind of program that was initiated. As you well know, we are going to open 23 more centers this year. We have committed to staying involved. We have our regional representation still involved on the regional level. We have our agency representatives in constant contact.

As Mrs. Leonard and/or as Mrs. Jones' area interrelates with the agency, both in an ombudsman role and in a shared capacity of an individual representing in the interest of child care for GSA, those discussions are taking place. The policy as it looks internally within GSA has not changed. What has changed perceptively——

Mrs. COLLINS. But the focus—excuse me. I want make sure I understand that the focus internally at GSA has not changed.

Mr. AUSTIN. No, ma'am. We are committed to moving forward just as actively and vigorously as we have. The question then is who has the leadership role, and as was discussed earlier, OMB did issue guidance, that OPM under Mrs. Horner at the time, would provide leadership roles relative to the Federal Government, and that the Department of Labor under Secretary McLaughlin at the time would provide leadership roles for the private sector.

We've been waiting for guidance from them on that, but not waiting at a standstill. We have promulgated our own guidance, have shared that guidance in terms of the guidebook with those agencies and with OMB. We have solicited from OMB as to whether or not, as you stated, the initiative has changed, has the guidance changed, is there something different that we ought to be doing.

As you know, having received copies of all the correspondence, I have not received a response to my letter. That request was stimulated simply to ensure that I had not in some way misunderstood Mr. Alderson, when he received the letter in early September, and his assumptions and beliefs of what that letter meant, and that I, myself, had not also misunderstood.

So, Madam Chairwoman, that's where we're at today. But the commitment is still there.

Mrs. COLLINS. Well, is the commitment there in a lesser degree, let me ask you that? It seems to me that when Mrs. Leonard was there, her sole responsibility was to create onsite child care centers. There was certainly a better focus. It was a broader focus, and one that was right on target.

Now it seems to me that—and I'm not trying, by any means, to suggest that you, as Acting Administrator, must run the program in this manner—but it seems that the focus to create onsite child care centers has lessened. Before, Mrs. Leonard could exclusively focus on the development of child care centers, but now her time is divided to address many other issues.

Mr. AUSTIN. Well, Madam Chairwoman, I have augmented that staff, if you will. Mrs. Leonard still plays a major role in a high level position. Mr. Howard plays a role in a high level position. We then have Mrs. Jones, the head of what is known as PG, our Office of Government-wide Real Property Policy and Oversight, down in the agency policy guidance, playing a major role.

We also have a director of our child care and development down in the agency playing a role and a support staff to that director playing a role.

Mrs. COLLINS. Who reports directly to you as Acting Administrator?

Mr. AUSTIN. I receive reports both from Mr. Howard; I receive reports from Mrs. Leonard; and I receive reports from Mrs. Jones.

Mrs. COLLINS. So, the responsibility is sort of spread out, not a crystal focus?

Mr. AUSTIN. Well, we still have a director down in the agency with a support staff under the policy guidance area as well, supporting the program.

Mrs. COLLINS. How many child care centers did you say you were planning to open this year?

Mr. AUSTIN. Twenty-three.

Mrs. COLLINS. Twenty-three.

Mr. AUSTIN. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. COLLINS. How many in fiscal year 1990?

Mr. AUSTIN. We will be soliciting additional child care centers throughout this year and programmatically schedule them for 1990.

Mrs. COLLINS. Do you know how many at this time?

Mr. AUSTIN. I believe it's one or two that we've actually scheduled, but that number will grow. Last year, Madam Chairwoman, as we were opening the 25 which we had committed to do, we were gathering the number for this year. Those numbers tend to grow every year. That is not an indication of a lessening of concern.

Mrs. COLLINS. Well, I sure hope not, because it seems like a major shrinking of effort, because you're already into 1989 fiscal year. We're just about to plan for 1990 fiscal year. Now if you only have one or two on the planning board, it seems to me that they're going to have to grow dramatically.

Mr. AUSTIN. Madam Chairwoman, when I asked in September how many were we going to do in 1988, the answer was we're not sure. We're still compiling those figures, and those figures will still be compiled this year for next year. It's an ongoing program. It certainly hasn't diminished.

Mrs. COLLINS. Do you have a goal, a distinct goal, for creating a certain number of onsite child care centers in fiscal 1990 or 1991?

Mr. AUSTIN. We have not established a numbered goal, no ma'am. What we have said is that we will meet the concerns and

the interest as expressed by the agencies, in getting child care centers developed.

Mrs. COLLINS. Well, won't you run into a little bit of a problem there? I know one agency in particular, inside an agency. It's the Social Security Administration. It has been dragging its feet for years when it comes to onsite child care, you know. If you're going to leave it up to the discretion of an agency like that, which sees no reason to have child care centers, an agency that does a poll—I guess you want to call it, because politicians like to use that word "poll"—of the needs of their particular agency, and send it out to people who are 65 years old and 70 and well beyond childbearing years, whether or not they feel they have a need for child care centers. So you get eschewed results.

It seems to me that the agencies can't be relied upon exclusively to determine their child care needs.

Mr. AUSTIN. Madam Chairwoman, I agree with you and we have been vigorously pursuing the Social Security Administration.

Mrs. COLLINS. Why hasn't it been successful? I mean this has been going on for a while.

Mr. AUSTIN. We've had some mixed successes. The SSA Administrator's position was that they have developed internally their child referral program, and therefore they were not pursuing the development of onsite child care.

We have had some SSA sites where we have been able to develop onsite child care. But we are still trying to pursue that issue and get them to join in the child care development.

Mrs. COLLINS. Thank you very much.

Mr. AUSTIN. Thank you.

Mrs. COLLINS. Mr. Cox.

Mr. COX. Can you tell me what is the typical cost of constructing an onsite child care center and what the construction entails?

Mr. AUSTIN. It really depends Congressman. The cost has ranged from $30 to $50 a square foot, depending upon the size and location. We've had some problems where we've had to abate health hazards and the cost has gone up. But nationally, it runs somewhere between $30 and $50 a square foot.

What we have done, and we're learning. We used initially a standard level office buildout requirement in our earlier stages, and then suddenly realized that children's restroom facilities really required a different standard than normal adult facilities.

We had to provide for kitchen areas, so that food could be prepared within the facilities. We have had to provide for laundry areas. So we have changed our standard level buildout to reflect those new requirements as a standard, as opposed to being an exception, and now we provide that in our guidance as well as in our buildout requirements.

Mr. COX. Your testimony is to the effect that fees are ranging from $65 per week in Ogden, to $160 per week for Boston, and $40 in Utah, and $125 a week in New York City, and so on. How do you determine the range of fees? What do they cover, and is there an operating loss?

Mr. AUSTIN. Let me address that in several different ways if I may, Congressman. No. 1, we do not develop the fees. The fees are developed by the provider, who oversees the operation of the

center, in concert with the board that is established to manage or oversee the provider, made up of mothers and fathers of the children that occupy the center.

Early on, GSA realized—and this goes back to the former Administrator, Golden, that we were confronted with one of two choices. One, to either provide day care or to provide child care. Day care being differentiated where a warehouse atmosphere would present itself. You'd bring them in; there would be no curriculum, no study process, no coordinated development of a learning process within the center, or we could do child care, in which case we would provide that.

It was decided that we would go for the child care option, so that we could expand the learning capabilities of those individuals within the facility. Plus, we also indicated that there were basically three types. We had infant care; we had preschool; and then we had those individuals who were in the kindergarten age range for school.

What has happened, and what we realized early on, is if we open centers under the 1986 resolution authorizing them to do that, GSA could absorb some of the cost for opening those centers, doing some of the buildout and some of GSA's space, providing it rent free, thereby reducing the cost for tuition across the country in various areas.

In some areas where we out lease, however, we can't abate that cost and we have to past those costs on. So that what happens is you see a regional difference, based upon how the center was developed, the kind of care that's being provided, and the cost that the provider is asking for the operation of the center.

Mr. Cox. In those areas where you are out leasing, are there operating losses?

Mr. AUSTIN. There are not operating losses. They are higher tuitions, and that's where it's coming from.

Mr. Cox. So the fees in each case are designed to cover the costs of operation of the center?

Mr. AUSTIN. Yes, sir; and the parent boards, I should say, are nonprofit boards, so they're not realizing a profit as a result of running the agency—or running the program.

Mr. Cox. To the extent that GSA is absorbing costs, is that reflected in a separate line item for child-care related expenses in GSA's budget?

Mr. AUSTIN. No, sir. We've just absorbed them in terms of space buildout or remodeling, or if space is there, we're not charging on the rental base for that space.

Mr. Cox. Internally, is GSA able to report to itself or to the public what those costs are?

Mr. AUSTIN. We could identify those costs, certainly Congressman.

Mr. Cox. Is that being done?

Mr. AUSTIN. It's not being done at this time.

Mr. Cox. OK. I'm interested in the chairwoman's inquiry concerning Barbara Leonard. Has the fact that she's been given other responsibilities been indicative of a lessening of GSA's commitment? Are there other people that are coming in to assist? Is there a diminishment or what is happening?

Mr. AUSTIN. Actually, her role has been broadened, if anything. She has taken on the role of ombudsman, if you will, for our client agencies on a whole myriad of issues, child care being but one of those issues. GSA has found itself many times in a confrontatious situation with the agencies that we're there to serve, and her role is to work with them, create a rapport and identify those concerns and then to work internally within GSA to offer up resolutions.

But we've also asked the Commissioner of PBS, Mr. Howard, to play a lead role in the development of child care facilities. We have an Acting Assistant Commissioner, Yvonne Jones, participating. Prior to that, former Assistant Commissioner, Ken Rashid, and then under Mrs. Jones' area, we have a Director of Child Care Development and a staff supporting that individual as well.

If anything, we have expanded the program, the outreach program, the contact program as opposed to contracting it.

Mr. Cox. Do you know whether the White House has scheduled child care in Federal buildings on an upcoming DPC agenda?

Mr. AUSTIN. Allow me to answer it in this way Congressman, I have reason to know that the current administration is in the process of developing a comprehensive child care program. I have not seen that program as of yet.

Mrs. COLLINS. Go ahead if you've got a few more questions to ask.

Mr. Cox. OK. Have you had any contact with OPM yourself since——

Mr. AUSTIN. I talked with Mrs. Horner on one occasion relative to the child care policy statement as I recall, and at that point we proceeded on to offer up our perspective of a draft statement, and that's what we have sent over to them.

Mr. Cox. Any contact since your recent appearance before the House Appropriations Committee?

Mr. AUSTIN. No, sir, and it was a result of that appearance and the other inquiries that I sent out the letter to OMB and then sent out the corresponding child care policy programs to OPM and to Labor.

Mr. Cox. I will yield all the time that I don't have left.

Mrs. COLLINS. Thank you. In your letter to the subcommittee, Mr. Austin, you cited a September 1988 OMB memorandum that involved primarily the Presidential campaign public relations effort that we've already mentioned in my opening statement. Can you tell me why it is that OPM last week claimed not to know anything about the purported transfer of more responsibility to them in the child care matter?

Mr. AUSTIN. Madam Chairwoman, I can't speak for OMB or OPM. The memorandum went out; it was clear. Mrs. Horner has contacted us or did contact us in the intervening time. It seemed at least at the high levels within OPM they were cognizant of it. Again, Madam Chairwoman, I can't speak for them.

Mrs. COLLINS. In the proposed guidebook that you're preparing for child care, do you mention anything in there about the responsibility that OPM has?

Mr. AUSTIN. At this point, I don't believe we have. No ma'am. We offered it up as a draft guide.

Mrs. COLLINS. Well, even if it's a draft copy, with knowing that OPM is going to have certain responsibilities, it seems to me that you would have included that?

Mr. AUSTIN. We provided that to OPM and figured that if OPM and under our belief that OPM had review process and right of incorporation, that they would incorporate our viewpoints as we've expressed them. Not knowing what OPM was developing or might be developing relative to the policy statements, we proceeded on and then offered that up to them for review.

Mrs. COLLINS. Well, don't you think that now is the time for you to get together with OPM, before you release any kind of guidebook, so that there will be a concerted effort in developing policy so that everyone will know how the onsite child care program will operate in the future?

Mr. AUSTIN. Yes, Madam Chairwoman, and that's exactly why we have offered it to OPM and to Labor for review and comment.

Mrs. COLLINS. Have you asked them to respond?

Mr. AUSTIN. I am not sure of the exact wording of the letter?

Mrs. COLLINS. By a certain deadline?

Mr. AUSTIN. I'm not sure of the exact wording of the letter to OPM and to Labor, but the intent was to ask them to respond. Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. COLLINS. And, as far as you know, they have not yet done so?

Mr. AUSTIN. They have not yet to this point in time, no, ma'am.

Mrs. COLLINS. Then do you—the agency which has the responsibility for creating, under the law, the child care centers, do you then have responsibility to ask them to respond quickly so that we all know what's going on around here?

Mr. AUSTIN. Yes, ma'am; and it was as a result of asking OMB for that same response that I was informed that there was a child care program package being developed and would be forthcoming.

Mrs. COLLINS. When?

Mr. AUSTIN. They indicated it would be in the very, very near future.

Mrs. COLLINS. When you find out, would you let us know?

Mr. AUSTIN. We hope to, yes, ma'am.

Mrs. COLLINS. I don't think I have any more questions. I think that what I have more is a statement, and I hate statements but my statement is that I just really am concerned, and I hope that the GSA will certainly proceed in the same aggressive manner that you have in the past, in developing these child care centers.

It just seems to me that with child care being so important in both the business as well as the Government sector, that the Federal Government cannot be lagging in developing the kind of child care centers we need.

We have all kind of statistics and reports done by major universities in the United States and by a very large number of corporations, Campbell's Soup, Fortune magazine, about the need for child care. They have learned repeatedly, time and time again, that when it comes down to child care, people are very interested. In fact, I can quote from an article that was in Fortune magazine.

It says that "corporations are beginning to discover that more and more of their most valued employees are willing to sacrifice

work time, productivity and possibly even careers to devote themselves to the care of their children," and they've also listed that wherein there is onsite child care, where there is child care that's readily available, productivity goes up, absenteeism goes down, morale is very high, and so forth.

We certainly cannot have the Federal Government, which already has enough trouble getting good, qualified people to come into the Federal workplace to not be at least in the same proverbial playing field as everybody else. So I hope that you will take our concerns very seriously and will continue to be aggressive, very aggressive in developing onsite child care centers.

I need not threaten you, but I know you know we're going to be looking to see, in fact, what you are doing, and hope that we can be proud of the effort under your administration as we have been under the past. Thank you for coming before us.

Mr. AUSTIN. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. May I make one additional comment?

Mrs. COLLINS. Sure.

Mr. AUSTIN. Having said and espoused all the successes and what I believe to be a very good and viable program, we do have a situation that did fall through the cracks if you will, and that being with the IRS area, and I know that Mr. Tobias will be testifying after me and to Mr. Tobias, I need to offer a public apology.

I had indicated to my staff the necessity to have a meeting with him personally to discuss his concerns relative to three areas, and unfortunately it was at the holiday season time and it did not happen. I have reinstructed them to establish that meeting.

However, if I may, Madam Chairwoman, I would like to bring you up to date on where we stand with regard to those three centers that Mr. Tobias specifically addressed.

Mrs. COLLINS. Sure. Without objection.

Mr. AUSTIN. The first one, and I have to say we have not had much cooperative effort from the IRS, in Brookhaven, NY. We even, as late as January 3, 1989, contacted Brookhaven, asked them what their desires, their intents were. We received a telephone inquiry back subsequent to that, in which they asked if building an annex to the existing facility would be new construction. We indicated that it would and I'll touch on that subject in just a second. They indicated they would be back to us and we've received no formal reply at this point.

The second area was Martinsburg, WV. Martinsburg, WV, is another location that was under consideration for a modular program. There was a decision made by the previous Acting Administrator, Mr. Alderson, that modular program development and new construction did not fall within the purview of the guidance given by the 1986 authorization.

Subsequent to that, I in the development of the policy statement for providing space at GSA, amended that to indicate that modular would be acceptable under those rare circumstances in which either space could not be provided onsite, or acquired through lease within a reasonable distance to that site, and we are now following that statement.

With that in mind, we have gone back and met with them in February of this year, and we reached an agreement that the com-

ponent of the IRS within the Martinsburg complex would relocate to a lease construction project, which would free up 5,000 square feet of space within the computer facility areas for child care development. We have targeted the vacancy date, September 1989, construction to be complete by July 1990, and occupancy by September 1990.

Chamblee, GA, was another area in which they had discussed the possibility of modular construction. At the point in time the initial denial was issued, modular construction was not an option. It is an option at this point in this rare instance. However, we fervently believe that there is still space within the Chamblee complex to accommodate child care development.

However, in discussions with the director, they have indicated they have no space and they're not prepared to surrender any space for development. We have now worked out a lease consolidation for Chamblee, GA, of approximately 541,000 square feet, and we'll be relocating them sometime in about 1993. In our prospectus, we have requested 4,500 to 5,000 square feet for child care facility in the new lease construction project.

We will also be contacting Chamblee and indicating that if the agency is interested in pursuing the modular development, that we will authorize that as an interim use between now and the time we do the lease construction.

Mrs. COLLINS. Thank you. Mr. Cox.

Mr. Cox. I'd like to, if I might, explore briefly just what it is that GSA does after the space is made available and is built out. What is the GSA involvement once the center has been developed and opened?

Mr. AUSTIN. Once the parent committee, which is made up of parents of those enrolled, take over the operation, they manage the facility vis-a-vis their provider, whomever that might be, whether it be an outside provider or someone that they bring on staff to manage and operate the center.

GSA's role then is in that instance supportive, to maintain the operation, to maintain it in terms of physically maintaining the center, providing for cleaning of the center, and to assist in any problems that might be developed. But in terms of guiding that operation, it switches then over to the parent committee and the parent committee does that.

Mr. Cox. It strikes me at least facially that it might make some sense to add to the mixture of agencies involved in getting child care off the ground in the Federal Government. OPM, which might have a role once the child care center is opened, in making sure that it continues to meet the needs of Federal employees. Is that what the Domestic Policy Council has in mind?

Mr. AUSTIN. What the current plan is, Congressman, I don't know. They haven't shared that with me at this point. It was my perceived belief and in discussion internally at the agency, that OPM representing the employees and working as closely with the unions that they do, that they would have been the logical agency to act as a stimulus, not necessarily one who would actually see the project completed or built out. That would still be GSA's role and perhaps my terminology before the Government Operations Com-

mittee and the Appropriations Committee when I said "supportive role," misled some individuals.

But clearly we would be responsible for the buildout and the construction and the overseeing of the completion of the center, but that the stimulus, that group working with the Federal employees, OPM, would be the natural lead agency.

Mr. Cox. Now the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act of 1976, is that familiar to you?

Mr. AUSTIN. Yes, sir.

Mr. Cox. And, as I understand it, that law authorizes GSA directly to lease space in public buildings to non-Federal entities for a variety of purposes, which might include child care. Have we used that authority?

Mr. AUSTIN. We have not used that authority, and the rationale for that is that under the Cooperative Use Act, anything that GSA would have done in terms of expending funds, providing assistance would have been at a cost, which would have had to have been reimbursed by the center, ostensibly by the Federal employees.

Under the 1986 act, we took a broader interpretation of that and have done buildout and do provide space at no cost to the centers, therefore reducing the tuition fees charged to the enrollees.

Mr. Cox. Although in some cases you mentioned, you are not in the position to abate that cost?

Mr. AUSTIN. Where we have outside leasing, we have to recap the outside lease cost.

Mr. Cox. Isn't that circumstance parallel to what it would be if you were using the authority under the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act?

Mr. AUSTIN. Yes, sir; it is.

Mr. Cox. All right. Just to explore this point a bit further, if GSA aggressively made sites available and there were contracting agencies outside the Federal Government that were willing to provide child care, might not that speed the process up a little bit?

Mr. AUSTIN. In many instances, outside agencies, private sector agencies do provide the child care under a contractual relationship with the parent board, and in those instances, many times still come in and give us guidelines of how they'd like to see the center finished or laid out, whether it's dealing with infant care, where you provide soundproofing and an enclosed area for crib occupancy, play area for a group of 2- to 3- to 4-year-olds, and another area for 4- to 5-year-olds.

So we do follow their guidelines in that respect, but they do contract with private sector agencies to operate the centers in many instances.

Mr. Cox. All right. In conclusion, I'd just like to say that we must keep in mind that it was just over 60 days ago that President Bush was inaugurated. I hope that we do get off the dime here quickly and that you include in your deliberations our subcommittee, our staff, so that our interests can be taken into account as the Federal Government develops its policies.

Mr. AUSTIN. Thank you, Congressman.

Mrs. COLLINS. Thank you for coming before us this morning, Mr. Austin. We certainly appreciate it.

Mr. AUSTIN. Thank you, Congresswoman and I appreciate it and look forward to working with you on this.

Mrs. COLLINS. Thank you.

Mr. AUSTIN. Thank you.

Mrs. COLLINS. Our next witness is Mr. Robert Tobias, who's the national president for the National Treasury Employees Union. Won't you come forward please?

Mr. TOBIAS. Good morning, Madam Chairwoman.

Mrs. COLLINS. Good morning. Let me just say that last Monday, GSA delivered various requested documents to the subcommittee, and included was a November 1988 letter to General Services Administrator Richard Austin from you, Mr. Tobias, who is the national president of the National Treasury Union.

In that letter, you accused GSA of reneging on previous commitments for three child care centers in IRS facilities in Brookhaven, NY, Martinsburg, WV, and Atlanta, GA. Upon review of your letter, we invited you to testify today, because you were only contacted yesterday. If you don't have a formal statement, you can give an oral statement at this time.

If you are prepared to answer questions for us and to review with us the basis of your concern on child care, you can do so at this time. But I wanted to get that on the record because of the very short notice that you did have.

Mr. TOBIAS. Thank you very much, Madam Chairwoman.

Mrs. COLLINS. You're welcome. You may begin your testimony at this time.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT M. TOBIAS, NATIONAL PRESIDENT, NATIONAL TREASURY EMPLOYEES UNION, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. TOBIAS. Thank you. I know I'm sort of preaching to the choir when I talk to you about the need for child care in the Federal Government, but the fact of the matter is that 52 percent of two-parent families with young children have both parents in the work force, and we also know that there are 7,300,000 single-parent households, the overwhelming majority headed by women.

There are 22 million children in families where both parents are in the work force, and over one-third of the parents report difficulty in finding acceptable child care. So the problem, the need is out there. It's a real problem, and solving that problem is one of those wonderful situations where everyone benefits.

It's certainly good for the employee, because it relieves incredible anxiety associated with the care of small children. It's good for the employer, the Federal Government, because as you pointed out, Madam Chair, there's less absenteeism, there's less tardiness, there's less anxiety, and there's more productivity.

It's certainly good for the public, because with more productivity, the public is well served. But most importantly, it's good for the kids. I've seen these child care programs, the ones that we have been sponsoring and that are up and operating and the idea of seeing a kid jump out of a car and run to a program and be embraced by teachers, and so forth, that are concerned with this kid is really wonderful.

We started our quest for child care centers with the Internal Revenue Service back in 1983. We were able to get one up and operating at the Andover Service Center, where there are 3,000 employees, 80 percent of whom are women and the vast majority are sole support. But of course we wanted a whole lot more.

We went to GSA to see if we could get some kind of funding from GSA to assist the development of these centers. Finally, we were able to get agreement and in a joint press conference that was attended by Larry Gibbs, then the Commissioner of IRS, Terry Golden, the Administrator of GSA, and myself, we announced jointly that we would—that GSA would fund the building costs of 10 IRS child care centers and indeed we were very, very pleased.

Based on this agreement, we have six centers up and operating all across the country in various locations. GSA, as Mr. Austin pointed out, promised specific support for three additional locations in addition to the six that we have up and operating now. The additional locations are the Brookhaven Service Center, at the National Computer Center in Martinsburg, WV, and at the Atlanta Service Center in Chamblee, GA.

Each of these locations required modular freestanding sites and each was given oral approval to proceed in the summer of 1988. The reason they needed freestanding sites was because of the space squeeze at each of these locations. It was well accepted that there was no—that they had no room for these centers. So GSA approved them.

In late fall, GSA reversed itself, again orally, and in January, Mr. Austin issued some written policy that confirmed what we'd heard in the fall, not to support freestanding modular buildings unless there are extreme circumstances. Now we've been able to find space at the National Computer Center and we hope to proceed on that, with that location. But on Long Island, at the Brookhaven Service Center, and in Chamblee, GA, there is no space.

So I'm pleased to hear Mr. Austin say that he's going to approve a modular freestanding space for Atlanta, but we need the same kind of help in Brookhaven. So right now we have 7 of the 10 promised sites. Unless GSA fulfills its promise, it looks like Mr. Austin is leaning toward us on two of these locations.

But more importantly, Madam Chair, we see a shift in the emphasis at GSA from a policy of nurturing and supporting these programs to one of neglect. These programs take a great deal of energy on the part of the participants, and on the part of the agency as well, because they're new tasks, they're new responsibilities and there are lots of problems that agencies aren't generally equipped to handle.

Just getting the approval process to get one of these programs off the ground is really very, very difficult and I can say that Barbara Leonard served in a very important role of nurturing these agencies and helping them to get over that, to solve those problems. The idea that Ms. Leonard is now an ombudsman might be nice and I know that this program is part of her responsibility, but this doesn't take a reactive kind of person; this takes an active person.

It isn't waiting for the agency to come and say "here's my problem." It takes someone who's out there saying "you can do this, this can be done, the problems are surmountable, and here is kind

of the shared experience to help you solve your problems." These child care centers can work; I've seen it happen. I've seen them fill up overnight in terms of vacancies and long lists develop.

They're very, very important programs and we would ask you, Madam Chair and this committee to continue to do everything you can to convince this administration and GSA to aggressively support the program and not to ignore it, because if it's ignored or it's neglected, it will die. I really appreciate, Madam Chair, the opportunity you've given me to testify on what I believe to be one of the most important issues that we have in the Federal work force today. Thank you.

Mrs. COLLINS. Thank you. I think it's significant that Mr. Austin gave a public apology to you.

Mr. TOBIAS. I agree, and I appreciate it, believe me.

Mrs. COLLINS. Yes. I think that shows a great deal of concern for that particular location and the fact that he was not able to do what he said he was going to do, to be able to apologize publicly shows the markings of a person who has real concern.

I also think, that if you will work with him to the extent possible, possibly you can work out all of these other things. Now he said that he has made some exceptions for you for modular units, and so forth. I think, too, that's an expression of his interest in trying to get something done as far as your union is concerned.

I just hope that you will continue to work with him and that you will keep us advised of the progress that you're making. If at any time you find the progress is not there, then I think that you should certainly let us know and we'll see if there's any way that we can help the two of you to get the final result, which is to get better care for the children.

Mr. TOBIAS. Thank you, Madam Chair. There's no question in my mind that the fact that you scheduled this hearing and asked the questions helped focus attention on a problem that may have gotten to the bottom of the pile. But you put it on the top of the pile. So we appreciate it.

Mrs. COLLINS. Mr. Cox.

Mr. COX. I just have what I think is a technical question. As I understand the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act of 1976, it authorizes GSA directly to lease space in public buildings. Likewise, the authority that was contained in Public Law 99-190 from December 1985 authorized GSA specifically to provide space for child care in federally-controlled buildings.

Do we need to change existing law in order to give GSA the authority to build buildings for child care, as opposed to identifying space in existing Federal buildings?

Mr. TOBIAS. I think not. I think that's going to depend, Mr. Cox, on how GSA interprets its authority. For a while, GSA was interpreting its authority so as not to be able to build buildings, freestanding buildings. They said that they could add on to existing space, but that they couldn't build these modular buildings.

Now that, of course, was 180 degree reversal from what had been the practice in the past, and now Mr. Austin seems to have reversed himself again, at least by saying in exceptional circumstances. Well obviously, those are on the only kinds of circum-

stances that would make sense. I mean you wouldn't build a building unless there wasn't any space to house this kind of a program.

Mr. Cox. Now one other question and then I'm finished. Does your union have any objection to working with OPM if they're willing to take an aggressive role in this development of child care centers in Federal buildings?

Mr. Tobias. Certainly, we don't object to working with OPM, but I believe that GSA is the key partner in this process, because GSA has the space and unless GSA is in the room where the bargains are being made, it's very difficult to deal through OPM to GSA. It's incredibly difficult to deal with an agency head now, because they say "well, we would love to be able to put up a child care program, but GSA won't let me," or "OPM won't let me," or whatever.

So what this program did was to put all the parties together in one room, so that we could reach an agreement. Since GSA is such a critical player in providing the space, I think it will be inefficient to delegate this responsibility to OPM. I believe that it's really GSA who has the space and who can either choose to allocate it or not. That's really the critical question.

Mr. Cox. I'm sorry. Let me rephrase the question. If GSA continues its role, which is not only authorized by statute but, as I understand the proceeding testimony, the current management direction of the agency—and OPM provides additional support for the ongoing management of child care agencies—that would not in any way be a hindrance, I expect, would it?

Mr. Tobias. It would depend on exactly how they worked the relationship, and I'm not—I haven't seen Mr. Austin's draft document. I mean he's only sent it to OPM. But my concern would be that GSA would take a back seat role. If they are going to be part of the negotiating group along with OPM, I don't see a problem.

But if they remove themselves from the process and put OPM in the room to make the deal, I think that it will be inefficient, because OPM can't commit GSA.

Mr. Cox. All right. It strikes me that (a) we may be looking at that kind of an executive arrangement in any case, (b) it makes some sense for OPM to be involved in the personnel side, as opposed to GSA which is obviously the space side, and if we can get both of them involved we'd probably be better off.

Mr. Tobias. I certainly think that OPM could provide some assistance in encouraging the development of these programs, but the first critical step is whether or not you have space, and that's really—the key to the space is GSA.

Mr. Cox. Understood. I have no further questions, thank you.

Mrs. Collins. I haven't either. Thank you very much for coming before us, Mr. Tobias. We appreciate your testimony.

Mr. Tobias. Thank you.

Mrs. Collins. The hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:10 a.m., the subcommittee adjourned, to reconvene subject to the call of the Chair.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

MAR 17 1989

Honorable Richard Austin
Acting Administrator
General Services Administration
Washington, D.C. 20405

Dear Mr. Austin:

As you know, the Administration is committed to new approaches that will help parents, especially low income parents, make critical decisions about their children's care. We also are working to make certain that child care policies for Federal employees will assist them in making the child care arrangements that best suit their needs.

Your recent letter transmitting draft guidelines for establishing child care centers will be very helpful in finalizing Federal child care policies. GSA has been at the forefront of efforts to facilitate the establishment of on-site child care centers for Federal employees.

On the other hand, federally assisted child care arrangements may represent employee benefits which should be assessed by the new Director of the Office of Personnel Management. I would appreciate your deferring issuance of draft guidelines at this time until a new OPM Director is in place and has had a chance to do the assessment.

I want, nonetheless, to leave no doubt that Federal child care is a top priority, and I would hope GSA would continue its programs in this area. Our purpose in requesting you to defer the guidelines is to permit their consideration by the new leadership at OPM in order to assure they provide for equitable distribution of these benefits.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Frank Hodsoll

Frank Hodsoll
Executive Associate Director

(21)

FEDERAL TIMES

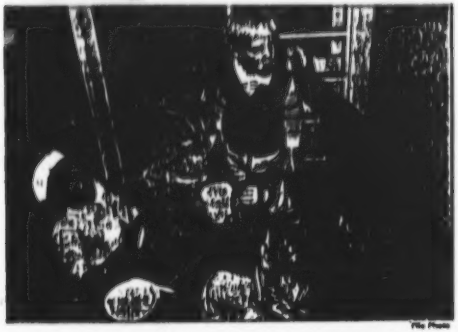
February 27, 1989

GSA Shift of Childcare Planning to OPM Comes as Surprise

By Rita L. Zeidner

Childcare advocates on Capitol Hill were caught off guard by a General Services Administration official who said responsibility for providing child care had shifted from his agency to the Office of Personnel Management.

Acting GSA Administrator Richard Austin, testifying during a recent appropriations hearings, raised eyebrows when he stated that the Labor Department would have the responsibility of coordinating child care in the private sector while OPM would be responsible in the federal government.



Plans to open more on-site daycare centers such as this one at the General Services Administration in Washington, D.C., are in limbo while the agency shifts childcare responsibilities to the individual agencies.

His remarks left some congressional staffers wondering if GSA plans to continue providing space in federal facilities for the centers.

An OPM spokeswoman said various officials denied knowledge of either Austin's remarks or the change.

Rep. Cardiss Collins, D-Ill., chair of the House government activities and transportation subcommittee, said she was "very concerned" about Austin's statements and will meet with GSA staff to ferret out exactly what he meant. A staffer said the subcommittee will request documentation to ensure that GSA does not intend to cease building childcare centers in federal buildings.

Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., who attended the appropriations hearing, expressed surprise at Austin's remarks. But a staffer said Wolf was not concerned about the change, so long as it did not jeopardize the establishment of on-site centers.

Since October 1987, when then GSA Administrator Terence Golden formed an office to assist agencies and parent groups in establishing on-site facilities, the number of centers increased nearly fourfold. Fourty-four centers are housed in GSA-owned or controlled space, with additional centers scheduled to open. By the end of the year, 2,500 children will be attending day care in federally controlled space, according to GSA estimates.

Traditionally, agencies seeking space for child care approached GSA for assistance, according to Barbara Leonard, who was appointed by Golden to oversee the development of childcare centers. Last year, she said, "we were much more proactive."

But Leonard, who recently took on the dual role as director of operations and client relations at GSA, said the direction of the program has not been determined.

"We're in a state of flux in Washington and are undergoing a change in administration. We're in a hiatus mood to see what Congress is going to come up with," Leonard said.

Leonard said while GSA will contine to provide space, its role in getting the centers off the ground will be reduced. While the agency previously distributed surveys to determine which buildings would be suitable for facilities, it will now be up to agencies to conduct the surveys and demonstrate the need.

She also said GSA was encouraging agencies and parent groups to look to alternatives to on site facilities.

"We cannot hope to build enough on-site child care for all federal parents," she said. Three-quarters of all parents choose centers away from their offices. "They feel it's somewhat better, so they opt to use other available facilities," she said.

Leonard said cost was a major drawback, with some centers costing as much as $178 per week per child.

Leonard encouraged the establishment of referral services like those offered by the Social Security Administration and OPM. "Referral services can serve a large number of employees right now."